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TEACHING JAPANESE IN A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE, A PRACTICAL STUDY.

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THE AUTHOR, WHO IS A HISTORIAN, POINTS OUT THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF TEACHERS IN SMALL COLLEGES WHO ARE FACED WITH TEACHING ASIAN LANGUAGES IN ADDITION TO SURVEY COURSES IN FAR EASTERN CULTURAL HISTORY. HE HAS FOUND THAT A COURSE IN THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF JAPAN OR CHINA WILL LEAD TO A DESIRE ON THE PART OF SOME STUDENTS TO LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT THE JAPANESE OR CHINESE LANGUAGE. BECAUSE OF THESE INTERRELATED INTERESTS, A COLLEGE PLACING THE JAPANESE OR CHINESE LANGUAGE IN ITS CURRICULUM SHOULD ALSO OFFER A COURSE IN JAPANESE OR CHINESE HISTORY. WHILE IT IS IMPRACTICAL TO OFFER TOO MANY MAJOR FIELDS IN A SMALL COLLEGE, A STUDENT IN SUCH A SCHOOL COULD MAJOR IN ANY OF A NUMBER OF EXISTING DEPARTMENTS AND USE ASIAN STUDIES COURSES FOR CREDIT TOWARD HIS MAJOR. THOSE INTERESTED IN CONTINUING BEYOND THE LIMITS OF A SMALL SCHOOL CURRICULUM SHOULD INVESTIGATE THE COOPERATIVE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS FOR CRITICAL LANGUAGES AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, OR AVAILABLE SUMMER INSTITUTES OFFERING ADVANCED STUDIES IN THESE LANGUAGES. AN OVERRIDING PROBLEM IN THE AREA OF METHODS AND TECHNIQUES IN THE SMALL COLLEGES IS FINDING ADEQUATE TIME FOR LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION. ANOTHER PROBLEM IS FINDING TEXTBOOKS WHICH ARE SATISFACTORY FOR THE NEEDS OF A SMALL SCHOOL. THE AUTHOR STRESSES THE NEED FOR LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION TEXTS IN MODERN JAPANESE WHICH WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT AMONG OTHER THINGS THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTENT AS WELL AS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WRITTEN AND SPOKEN JAPANESE, AND TEXTBOOKS WRITTEN IN A STYLE WHICH IS EASILY COMPREHENSIBLE TO USERS WHO ARE NOT SCIENTIFIC LINGUISTS. THIS PAPER WAS READ AT THE SOUTHEAST REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES, FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA, 4 FEBRUARY 1967. IT APPEARED IN "LIBERAL EDUCATION," VOLUME LIII, NUMBER 2, MAY 1967, PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES, 1818 R STREET N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009. (AMM)

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TEACHING JAPANESE IN A SMALL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

A PRACTICAL STUDY *

David F. Anthony

In agreeing to discuss teaching Japanese in a liberal arts college I have tried to design my remarks so that they may be of interest to people in several fields. I hope they may be helpful - or at least provocative - to members of curriculum committees, people in the social sciences dealing with Asian Studies, and finally to others who are teaching so-called "exotic" languages.

I should explain that I am primarily an historian. Therefore, I hope the professional linguists may be charitable and helpful in their judgements of and comments upon the remarks that follow. I shall deal with the questions of the value or lack of value of teaching such languages in the small college; the surrounding curriculum within which such languages should be taught; problems of staffing or man power; and finally techniques and equipment. Hopefully, an examination of these questions may help toward wise decisions regarding whether such languages should indeed be taught in the small college - and, if so, how.

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Whether one believes there is substantial value in teaching Asian languages in the small college or not, it is likely that any course in the cultural history of China or Japan will lead to a desire on the part of some students to learn something about the Chinese or Japanese language. At least, I have found this to be the case; and it was in this way that I found myself teaching Japanese, although I had not intended to do so. In the academic year 1963-64 a small group of my students in Japanese cultural history voiced an interest in learning the language and I began a very informal and entirely voluntary conversation class which met only one evening a week. There were only four or five students who were really diligent about it, but they persisted. Three of them are now in Japan and one is well on her way to a doctorate in Japanese linguistics from the University of Hawaii. The lessons of this experience are - first, that interest accompanied by opportunity for study is very likely to lead to skill and the addition of more professionals to the ranks of Asian scholarship, despite the limited personnel and resources of the small college. Secondly, the continuing economic, political and military involvement of the United States in Asia takes significant numbers of our students to the Far East after graduation. They are aware of this, and some of them, quite rightly,

want to have the linguistic equipment which will help them to gain a better understanding of their environment or to be more effective in their work.

In addition to these two rather obvious arguments for the value of teaching an Asian language in the small college, I think there are other somewhat less directly observable or easily verifiable reasons. One of the obvious potential strengths of the small college is the closeness of communication among the whole student body and the closeness of communication also between faculty and students. Almost everyone, students and faculty alike, is identified or identifiable by everyone else. There are very few isolated or unknown corners of the curriculum. The fact that Japanese is being taught and who is teaching and who is studying the language is pretty well known and is of interest to many in a small academic community. Some of the mystery, exotic nature, or remoteness of Asian languages is thereby dispelled. In other words, the built-in communications net of the small college serves as a public-relations or advertising service for the language. (I suppose this could be a bad thing, but so far it has worked to our advantage.) The public-relations or advertising results within the college help, I believe, in stimulating interest and enrollment in other Asian area courses --- aside from the recruitment of students for the language itself.

What can we say about the surrounding curriculum within which the Asian language should be taught? In the first place, I think it should be obvious that teaching Japanese - or Chinese - or any language from a distinctively non-Western European culture should not be undertaken without the existence of social science courses which deal with the cultural history of the area. This may be obvious, but the student who attempts to study Japanese or Chinese without some knowledge of the culture in which the language developed is going to suffer from distinct handicaps. Just to cite one glaring example, the student of elementary Japanese can scarcely get through the first year without a significant number of encounters with the dating system and references to Taisho, Meiji, Meiji Isshin and other terms which should immediately ring a bell and set up the mnemonic reflexes for a person who has some knowledge of the history of Japan. Furthermore, the various verb forms and modes of address which are associated with Japanese ideas of etiquette and propriety are a truly frightful tangle for one who has no conception of the traditional structure of Japanese society. To a certain extent, I believe the same kind of problems exist in Chinese. One could go into much more detail on this matter, but I believe it might be belaboring the obvious. To enter into the study of Japanese with any ease

at all, it seems to me it is necessary to first know or at least to be simultaneously gaining an understanding of the historical development and the social dynamics of Japanese culture.

What this clearly means is that the college placing the Japanese language in its curriculum should also offer a course in Japanese history. And a college that takes on the teaching of Chinese, I'm sure, should offer a course in the history of China.

Is this an adequate curricular frame for teaching Japanese? I don't believe it is, for if the student is to have a well-balanced understanding of Japanese history, he should see it within the context of Asian, or at least Far Eastern, culture. There should then be also at least a survey course in Asian or Far Eastern civilization. The benefits of these course offerings - linguistic and historical - are reciprocal. The language student cannot do well without the civilization courses. Although the students who have the civilization courses do not need the languages at all, some will be motivated to take them and thereby gain a much better understanding. Furthermore, contact with students who <u>are</u> studying the languages of the area has some effect on those who are taking the more general courses.

At the college where I teach, students frequently ask me whether they may major in Asian Studies. The answer to that question is presently, "No." When they ask if we will ever have an Asian Studies major, my answer is, "I don't see any need for it now." It seems to me that it is impractical to offer too many major fields in a small college. (Our enrollment is about 800). It is now possible for a student to choose from twenty-two major fields, and this leads to some departmental frustration with a senior class of only about 125.

On the other hand, the person interested in Asian Studies may major in any one of a number of existing departments and use Asian Studies courses for credit toward her major. This is due in part to the distribution of Asia-related courses in other departments, which brings me to a brief description of the curriculum at Randolph-Macon related to Asian Studies. We include under the listing of Asian Studies in our catalog - besides elementary and intermediate Japanese - a Survey of Asian Civilization, Chinese Civilization, and Japanese Civilization. In other departments - taught by those departments - we offer Asian Art, World Religions (which is predominantly Asian), Comparative Government (Asia), and Philosophies of India. The cooperation between departments is excellent; and there does not presently seem to be any need for establish-

ing a major in Asian Studies. Students majoring in art, history, philosophy, political science, or Russian Studies can include in their programs a generous amount of Asian Studies and prepare themselves for specializing in the Asian area in graduate school. So far this arrangement has worked very well, and it has saved me from the possibility of running into resentment through competing for majors.

I think you might still ask legitimately whether we offer enough of the language since we only offer two years of Japanese. The answer is in part related to the problem of staffing or manpower. Most small colleges cannot afford to carry a person who simply teaches Japanese. The problem has to be seen within the context of the total educational objectives of the contemporary liberal arts college - and they cover a very broad spectrum. Therefore, the Asian Studies man at Randolph-Macon Woman's College teaches two years of language, the Asian Survey, Chinese Civilization and Japanese Civilization - and is a member of a team that teaches a Sophomore honors Colloquium (a regularly accredited course) on "twentieth century issues". He also carries the usual committee assignments which tend to fall rather heavily on an Asian Studies person in this day of expanding interest in the field.

We advise the students who wish to go on with more advanced

work in the Japanese language to attend one of the several very good summer institutes. So far this has proven to be very satisfactory, but there is still another option available to the outstanding student - that is, to join the Cooperative Undergraduate Program for Critical Languages at Princeton University. Other universities may eventually set up similar programs, since the Princeton program seems to be a success.

I suspect our experience with the responsibilities of the exotic language teacher has been fairly typical. The person who teaches Asian languages at the small college will probably have to be equally well prepared to teach civilization courses and perhaps some course outside the immediate circle of Asian Studies. I do not object to this myself, for it keeps me in touch with the general college environment.

This means, however, that the teacher of Japanese will probably have to be a generalist rather than a specialist, and the quality of his language teaching may well be weaker than that of a linguistic scientist.

In my own case, not being either a linguistic scientist or a native speaker of the language, I have gotten assistance in two ways. First, I have used Japanese exchange students as informants for conversational Japanese. This I have found to be fraught with hazards and booby-traps. One of the worst is that the female exchange student from Japan tends to be

very "sensei-conscious". Since I am not only not a native speaker, but am also a male teaching females to speak Japanese, it is quite likely that I may say the wrong thing in conversation class. (I have discovered that most textbooks are unsatisfactory when it comes to female forms of address and vocabulary.) The young Japanese student is often very reluctant to correct the teacher. This year I have been blessed with the presence in our dance department of a native Japanese who is quite well-attuned to American folkways and whom I can rely upon to contradict me, if necessary. I feel this is a special problem in teaching young ladies, but a rather important one. Unless the generalist who teaches the language in the small college is most unusually gifted, I think the quality of instruction will suffer badly without the assistance of a native speaker.

This leads us naturally, I think, to questions of techniques and equipment. In my opinion, there is one overriding problem in the area of methods and techniques in the small college which dwarfs all others, and it arises from factors I have discussed already. It is available time - the time of the instructor and the available class time on the college schedule. The time of the Asian generalist on a college faculty is spread thinly over a wide span of teach-

ing responsibilities; and this leads to frustration - for teaching Japanese even to a small class could easily be almost a full-time task. However, even more important than the instructor's shortage of time is the difficulty of establishing and maintaining sufficient contact and continuity for the students with the language. The instructor may have to content himself with three class hours widely scattered and use of the language laboratory facility, which brings up an entirely different set of problems which have been frequently discussed by teachers of all languages. Continuity of exposure is especially critical for beginning students in non-Western languages, and this is true of both first and second year study. Further, I believe that with languages employing ideographic systems the problem is more acute than with those with phonetic systems of writing. The teacher of Japanese in the small college, then, will often have to fight for adequate instructional time to do the job properly.

One of the reasons generous class time is important for Japanese is the unsatisfactory quality of existing textbooks. In my opinion, an adequate Japanese textbook for the small college has yet to be written. Indeed, I suspect that one could be even more broadly critical and say quite simply that we do not yet have an adequate text or set of texts for the study of modern Japanese.

The existing texts for Japanese are not nearly clear enough in describing the importance of cultural and social context. They do not clearly distinguish between the written and spoken language. None of them has successfully coped with the challenge of systematic analysis of the structure of the language; and none of them has a satisfactory index system to aid the student in finding the answers to grammatical questions. The successful use of any of them requires a far greater amount of time on the part of the instructor than comparable texts in Western European languages or Russian. Finally, none of them is attractive in terms of typography and format.

It seems to me that all the texts I have surveyed have approached the teaching of Japanese on the basis of some special teaching situation - none of which conforms to the needs of teaching the language in the small college. The Yale text by Jorden and Chaplin[1] is probably the best for an introduction to conversational Japanese. However, it does require a tremendous amount of class time - and if one uses Jorden faithfully, there is no time left for introducing any of the written language in the first year - a situation which I feel holds the student back from an important part of the experience.

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[1] Eleanor Harz Jorden and Hamako Ito Chaplin, Beginning Japanese, Yale Linguistic Series 5, 2 vols., Yale University Press, New Haven, 1962.

Furthermore, I believe many of the peculiar problems of Japanese - such as the formation of compound words - cannot be well understood from a simply phonetic point of view. Martin's Essential Japanese[2] also follows the purely phonetic approach and was designed to be used in Japan with the aid of a Japanese tutor. Martin, furthermore, does not distinguish well between male and female conversation and contains a significant number of pattern sentences which may not be considered good language by a well-educated Japanese. The Harvard text - Hibbett and Itasaka[3] - dives immediately into very difficult written material - discussing such complicated matters as the Japanese concepts of obligation and indulging in bi-lingual puns using French and Japanese in the opening chapters.

When a good student works on her Japanese in preparing for an examination, she has to have at hand Jorden, Martin, Sakade[4], and several other books - and even then she is frustrated.

What is really needed is a text written with the student's position more clearly understood. If such a text is produced,

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2 Samuel E. Martin, Essential Japanese, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Tokyo, 1964.

3 Howard Hibbett and Gen Itasaka, Modern Japanese. A Basic Reader, 2 vols., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1965.

4 Florence Sakade, A Guide to Reading and Writing Japanese, Charles A. Tuttle, Tokyo, 1964.

it will contain facets not currently present in available textbooks. In addition to a more basic and more carefully classified linguistic analysis, it will also encompass to the degree necessary the viewpoints of paralinguistics, psycholinguistics, and cultural context.

I would add one more item which would greatly ease the problem of the poor soul trying to conduct a streamlined and yet effective course of instruction. This would be a pedagogical grammar which would organize technical descriptions into arrangements, which would be most useful to those who use them as sources of construction of Japanese language teaching materials - and as Dr. Alfred Hayes of the Center for Applied Linguistics has suggested, it should be written in a style which is easily comprehensible to users who are not scientific linguists.[5]

Despite the difficulties I have outlined, the job seems to get done in the small college - with willing students. Some of them will go on to solid achievements in Asian scholarship and others will have added to their lives an enthusiastic and well-informed interest in Japanese and Asian culture which will go with them wherever they go.

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[5] Alfred S. Hayes, "New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching", The Modern Language Journal, Vol. XLIX, No. 5, May, 1965.